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INTEGRATION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE

Letter dated 18 April 2002 from the Ambassador for Human Rights of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Dominican Republic addressed to the Chairperson of the Commission on Human Rights at its fifty-eighth session

I have the honour to transmit the report on the integration of the human rights of women and the gender perspective and progress in this area in the Dominican Republic.

I should be grateful if you would have this report* circulated as a document of the Commission on Human Rights at its fifty-eighth session.

(Signed) Rhadys ABREU DE POLANCO
Ambassador

* Annex reproduced as received in the language of submission, Spanish, and in English, only.

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Annex

Sir,

Allow me firstly, on behalf of the Dominican Republic, to congratulate you on your election as Chairperson and to offer you our best wishes for the successful conduct of the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on Human Rights. In this statement I shall address the integration of the human rights of women and the gender perspective.

The question of the human rights of women has reached a very important stage in the Dominican Republic, as we are now seeing the outcome of participation by the people and, in particular, of the efforts of women over the past decade to reform and modernize the State. Four developments reflect these achievements.

Firstly, with regard to legislative and juridical reform, the enactment and implementation of legislation has strengthened and extended the rights of women. Seven legislative instruments were enacted in the period January 1998-September 2001. These acts implement the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and legislate on the situation of migrants, health, social security and political participation by women; they thus impact on the discharge of its commitments by the Dominican Republic.

Secondly, there is the establishment of mechanisms and programmes which are directly or indirectly linked to the advancement of women. These include:

Public sector work programmes (areas) and projects for women. Some 20 programmes are available under sectoral institutions in the areas of education, training, health, production, credit, planning and violence, among others. Most of these programmes have been established over the past five years. Some are national in scope, such as the regional coordination undertaken by the sectoral agricultural office for women of the Ministry of Agriculture (with staff in all regions, and all zones and sub-zones of work), and the 37 provincial and municipal offices of the Ministry for Women. In addition the Ministry for Women and the sectoral gender equity and development units have developed 17 projects and programmes, to become operational in all public sector institutions from the beginning of 2002. Current government policy gives priority in these public sector programmes and projects to women who are impoverished, heads of household, single or disabled;

Programmes and projects run by civil society organizations for the establishment of women's rights. The Women's Rights NGO Coordination Bureau alone has 25 member institutions, with a number of projects for the defence, promotion and advancement of women's rights in all areas involving the physical, spiritual and intellectual development of women;

Intersectoral, intrasectoral and inter-institutional coordination mechanisms bringing together the public sector and civil society on the basis of common proposals in 18 bodies including the Inter-Institutional Committee for the Protection of Migrant

Women (CIPROM), the National Commission for the Prevention of and Fight against Domestic Violence (CONAPLUVI) the Sectoral Council for Women, the Intergovernmental Committee against Child Prostitution, the National Commission for Breastfeeding, the National Commission on Maternal Mortality, the Inter-Institutional Commission on Child Development, etc.

Thirdly, the design and formulation of mechanisms for action have already been outlined. The national gender equity plan, the platform for the advancement of Dominican women 1995-2001 and the assessment of the Beijing Platform for Action in the Dominican Republic 1995-2000 are all instruments developed on the basis of cooperation with women's NGOs and public sector institutions. This is also true of the adoption by the Dominican Republic of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;

Fourthly, specific activities to defend and promote the human rights of women, such as the women's welcome stations (San Francisco de Macoris and Santiago), strengthening of NGO education programmes for low-income women in rural and urban areas, and expansion of government and non-governmental offices working to defend women's legal rights. Legal procedures governing women detainees have been simplified and some improvement has been noted in the prison infrastructure throughout the country. A support office for reform and modernization of the system of justice has been established, leading to significant improvements in the legal domain for women. In addition, campaigns to disseminate women's rights, largely with regard to violence and political participation and eligibility, have been conducted, although there is no ongoing, systematic dissemination campaign, these having taken place on two occasions, 8 March and 25 November.

While all these mechanisms, instruments and activities cover all aspects of the human rights of women, some areas have been given greater priority, for example, violence, which has been focused on by civil society and the State. However, labour rights, and the economic rights of women, remain on the periphery in efforts to promote women's rights. In this connection article 18, on social rights, of the constitutional reform proposal put forward by women's groups provides that: "The State, through its legislation and policies, shall guarantee the exercise of the economic and social rights of low-income sectors of the population and shall accordingly provide protection and assistance to the most vulnerable groups and sectors. The State shall take appropriate action to combat social problems with the assistance of international agreements and organizations".

The Dominican Republic has taken a number of special measures to promote gender equity: establishment of the Ministry for Women, ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, establishment of sectoral gender equity units, a proposal for coordination between the Ministry for Women and civil society, and elements of social policy and poverty eradication. We also wish to draw particular attention to the legislation increasing the quota for inclusion in lists of candidates and the proposals for constitutional reform made by women's groups, which have been welcomed by the special commission responsible for coordinating participation by civil society in this process. Nevertheless, the process of amending the Civil and Penal Codes remains sluggish. This has been a point of dissent raised in the document on assessment of the Beijing Platform for Action,

since assessment of the reform and updating of the country's legal provisions by the women's movement, the Ministry for Women and women belonging to parties has yet to take place.

The sectoral gender equity and development offices were established under Presidential Decree No. 974-01 of 26 September 2001, with representation in each government ministry under the coordination of the Ministry for Women, with the purpose of incorporating a gender perspective at the national level in the policies, plans, actions programmes and projects of each government ministry. The Decree, in its article 4, provides that each office is to monitor, assess and report every six months to the Ministry for Women on progress in plans, policies and strategies for equality between men and women in addition to coordinating the adjustments needed within each area for implementation of and compliance with the agreements and international commitments signed and undertaken by the Dominican Republic.

This measure is crucial, given the rather scattergun approach of government efforts to achieve gender equity. These units will make it possible to reorder, adapt, coordinate, systematize and optimize the available financial and human resources and to implement consistently the policies devised by the Ministry for Women, with the help of other State institutions (as part of the national gender equity plan), and other measures considered to be important in the periodical adjustments to national gender equity policies.

In July 2001, the Ministry for Women prepared a proposal on coordination with NGOs, which would be based on identifying jointly the ethical principles on which to base the cooperation, coordination and solidarity between the sectors, thereby reaffirming the commitment to "the model of shared responsibility between the State and civil society to promote the exercise of citizenship".

This proposal is a response to the situation already described and is "in the interests of moving beyond the ad hoc and informal nature of the relationship between the State and civil society and of overcoming its weaknesses (lack of accountability, discontinuity, improvisation and informality)" while at the same time enabling the Ministry for Women to exercise the powers attributed to it by law.

The ethical principles set forth in the proposal are respect for the ideological and administrative independence of the parties, transparency in negotiations and discussions on coordinated action and in its implementation, and a commitment to follow up national and international agreements concerning women. It also establishes coordination mechanisms and areas of impact and protection in order to shape the formulation and implementation of government policies and to promote legal reforms, training and internal debate, the joint implementation of projects and monitoring and accountability.

It also aims to institutionalize the participation and input of NGOs and to coordinate moves towards greater efficiency and improved geographic coverage and quality by optimizing resources, institution-building to strengthen the economic and political sustainability of the organizations, insofar as the Ministry for Women can be strengthened, acting as a catalyst in the processes of political and cultural change required to advance gender equity, effectively channelling the demands made by civil society on the State, monitoring each other's fulfilment of commitments and following up the implementation of gender equity legislation.

The Government's social policy is intended to help reduce poverty and to this end priority has been given to the target population of poor women in the country. Three examples of this, as yet uncoordinated, practice are:

The micro, small and medium-sized enterprises programme (PROMIPYME) set up in 1997 to promote competitiveness, efficiency and the comprehensive development of this sector and to create new productive jobs and new sources of income for families has been introduced in all the institutions that make up the Government Welfare Office. One of its policies is to promote women's access to credit. It has been established that in 2001 women accounted for 59 per cent of the skilled population, 30 per cent of trained credit advisers and 53 per cent of the population receiving benefits under the presidential plan to combat poverty. In its strategy to reach its target population, PROMIPYME extends credit lines to seven NGOs, foundations and cooperatives working on microcredit programmes. Two of these organizations work specifically with women, who have received 44 per cent of the loans granted;

Although the presidential plan to combat poverty does not currently have a gender policy, those in charge of it try to favour initiatives and activities that help women by providing financial support for organizations running programmes for poor women, including support for the Ministry for Women. This is reinforced by the fact that over 80 per cent of the employees on its payroll are women, who work in the different technical, managerial and operational agencies regardless of their physical condition, age, social status or geographical location. For 2002 the plan envisions 10 kinds of action designed to contribute to the implementation of the principles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, including in the areas of finance, infrastructure and housing construction and support for the plan to combat domestic violence. Funding programmes for microenterprises and microcredit for women who do not meet the requirements of PROMIPYME and other credit programmes deserve to be highlighted here. The actions envisaged are aimed at lifting disabled and older women, women working in export processing zones (EPZs) or in the sex industry and women migrants out of extreme poverty.

The "decent community" plan, an action plan to reduce poverty, was drawn up by the National Planning Office (CNAPLAN) on the basis of the results of the study focusing on poverty. It also proposes rationalizing welfare spending through inter-institutional coordination that takes the participation of civil society to be a major factor in overcoming poverty. The plan includes:

Support for production cooperatives already initiated by small enterprises for women with the aim of helping reduce female unemployment. An example would be the cooperative of workshops making clothes and other textile products being run by the Ministry for Women at a cost of 60 million Dominican pesos;

Support for vulnerable heads of household by means of vouchers worth 500 pesos a month to purchase services from the Institute for Price Stability (INESPRE) and cheap restaurants. This has benefited 40,000 single mothers who are heads of household, or 60 per cent of all single mothers who are heads of household and who have children below the age of 14 in the areas defined as high priority because of their levels of poverty (of an estimated 167,399 mothers who are heads of household), at a cost of 240 million pesos.

Thank you very much.